

Christmas with the Wheelers by luxuriousvoyage11

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Summary:

Happy Holidays! :)

Christmas with the Wheelers

Author's Note:

Happy Holidays! :)

Jim Hopper was never one for the holidays. Despite the several years with Diane and Sara, he typically spent them alone with the festive music playing softly in the back, almost mocking him as he drank and smoked away in a daze. Never did he imagine on those lonely nights that, just a few short years later, he'd be on the couch watching a flustered 14-year-old girl run around his grandfather's cabin.

On the first week in December, nerdy stuttering Mike Wheeler had done his routine visit and bashfully invited El and her adoptive father over for Christmas dinner.

"It's only my aunts and uncles that come for dinner," he explained, "Lucas, Will, and Dustin are always busy with their families, but I was hoping El could spend her first real Christmas with me...and you too, of course" he said, cheeks red, eyes wide and hopeful.

He'd agreed, having no choice between the lasting guilt over keeping the teens apart last year and the excited look on El's face; besides, what real reason would he have to say no?

So, the morning of December 25th started off smoothly; the duo woke to Eggos and reruns of soap operas followed by El calmly opening her five small gifts under the tiny 3-foot tree. The gifts weren't extravagant, just some clothes Joyce had helped pick out for her and a photo album full of photos from the past year. El thanked and hugged him, running into her room to try on her new clothes.

The meltdown Hopper was currently watching, however, was an hour before they were meant to leave for the Wheelers. El's door was half opened, her irritated groans filtering through the small living space.

"You okay, kid?"

The small brunette threw the door open, her shoulder-length hair a mess of curls. A red and green plaid dress covered her body over black tights that led down to her feet covered with black flats.

“I look stupid,” she cried out dramatically.

“What do you mean?” he asked, “you look great!” he said honestly, patting himself on the back for getting a hang of this parenting stuff.

The girl violently shakes her head, “liar!”

He lets out a scuff and gets up from the couch, going over to where the girl stood in distress. It’s when he gets a closer look at her face that he resists the urge to let out a laugh. Her eyes are covered in messily applied bright green eyeshadow, almost distracting him from the unnatural red blush that covered one cheek more than the other.

“Relax, El,” he coughs out, “you can just, uh, wash it off?” he says as if it was a question.

Apparently, that was the wrong thing to say because her face pinched together even more and she let out an “ugh!” before storming back into her room.

“Kid, I really don’t get what the problem is,” he says, joining her to sit on top of her unmade bed.

“I wanna look nice for Christmas,” El sighs, “but I just don’t know how to use that,” she says, gesturing towards her dresser that was littered with eyeshadows and lipsticks.

Jim let out a short laugh, “well let’s try again then, yeah?” he asks calmly before going into the bathroom to wet a napkin.

Together, they wipe El’s face until it’s bare and, hesitantly, he applies the different colors and powders to her eyes, cheeks, and lips. Truthfully, he had no idea what he was doing; she had done her own makeup last year for the snowball but didn’t have qualms about it at the time, so he figured she was happy with it.

Several minutes later, he looks at her face and lets out a shrug, thinking it looked fine but knowing the real judge is the girl wearing

it. El looks into the mirror above her dresser and lets out a wide smile, turning around and hugging him again. Her eyes have a light dusting of a different green shade while her cheeks display a light tone of pink. He opted just for chapstick on her lips, wanting to keep a more natural look for the teen.

"Thank you," she says quietly, "I don't look stupid anymore." Laughing, he just shakes his head before going to change into a green sweater and jeans.

It's 3:15 when they see cars already lining the curbs of the cul-de-sac, the Wheeler home and it's perfectly kept bushes outlined with white lights. Hop gives El a look of encouragement, feeling her slight nervousness as she sits a little too stiffly in the seat next to him. She nods before opening the car door, her and Hopper walking up to the front of the house and knocking lightly. They hear Mike's shout of "I got it!" before he roughly throws it open.

"Hi, El! Hey, Hopper!" he says excitedly, "come in, come in." Mike helps Eleven out of her long black jacket, putting it on the coat-covered rack beside the door. Hop awkwardly stands there in his blue jacket, taking in the ridiculously decorated home. Garland and poinsettias were strategically placed around the home, the aroma of pies and sugar cookies in the air. Voices could be heard through the living room into the dining area and the Hopper's were intimidated, to say the least.

"My mom said dinner should be ready in 30 minutes," Mike informs them, bringing Jim's focus back to the two teens in front of him. El nods, looking at Mike as if he just told them he cured world hunger and Hop resists the urge to roll his eyes.

"Alright kid, thanks," he mumbles, removing his own jacket. When he turns around, the two teens are gone and he begrudgingly goes to mingle with the big group of men and women in the dining room.

Mike and El had run downstairs, the dark-haired boy silently closing the door behind them. They barely reached the bottom of the stairs before Mike took El into his arms, hugging her tightly.

"You look beautiful, El," Mike says sincerely, "I'm so glad you were

able to come.”

El rests her head on Mike’s chest, enjoying their closeness and immediately feels herself relax from the slight nerves earlier before.

“My older cousins were able to ditch coming here, lucky them,” he tells her, “so just my younger cousin is here and she’s upstairs with Nancy.”

Nodding her head, El pulls back from the hug and smiles at Mike. She looks down to assess his festive sweater and dress pants.

“I know, I look kind of dumb,” he says with an awkward chuckle, “my mom makes us dress up.”

Shaking her head, she smiles up softly at him. “You look nice.”

He gives her one last longing look before reluctantly going to the other side of the room and pulling out a small poorly wrapped gift.

“Here you go,” he says bashfully, giving the present to his girlfriend, “it’s not much, but I had to get you something.”

With an embarrassed blush, she looks at her feet. “Oh, I’m sorry,” she said, “I-I didn’t..” “No no,” he interrupts, “it’s okay, I just happened to see it and it made me think of you.”

That was only slightly a lie. He harassed Nancy for weeks to go shopping with him until she finally agreed to go with him in a few days before Christmas Eve. They would’ve come home empty handed had Nancy not noticed a little booth outside the many stores in the mall.

“It’s perfect,” Mike said with a smile before quickly handing over the crumpled up money from his pocket.

Like earlier in the day, El delicately unwrapped the blue wrapping paper before unveiling a black box. She held the box in her small hands, bringing it close to her face to examine it; she then looked at him with a smile, “thank you, Mike.”

Getting ready to hug him, Mike held her by her shoulders, bursting

out into laughter before shaking his head. “No, no, El,” he said softly, “your present is in the box.”

He put his hands on hers and moved it until the tiny clasp was visible. Eyebrows knitted, she flipped up the latch and took out the small platform that displayed a silver circle necklace. The circle was covered with three large snowflakes, tiny diamond studs in the middle of each. She felt the smooth texture of the jewelry before her finger grazed the side and she felt another little latch.

Pushing it down, the necklace opened and it revealed two photos; one of her and Mike, his chin resting on her shoulder from behind her while they smiled happily at the camera. The other was the whole party from a few weeks ago at the Byers thanksgiving dinner. They had all cuddled together on the couch to watch a movie when Jonathan quickly retrieved his camera and told the kids to smile.

El felt her eyes brim with what she now knew as happy tears, feeling her heart soar at the two pictures of her loved ones. With one last glance at the first picture, she closed the locket and saw an engraving on the back; “Merry Christmas, El. Love, Mike.”

That’s what did her over and she looked up at the boy with a tear rolling down her cheek. Mike’s eyes grew wide at seeing her face, frantically wiping the tear away, “oh my god, El, I’m so sorry, do you not-“

He was interrupted by her lips smashing onto his, her body leaning onto him as she stood on her tippy toes. He smiles into the kiss, bending his head down to meet her more comfortably and firmly planting his hands on her waist. She moves her hands to cup his face before pulling away and looking up at him, her teeth biting down on her lip to hide her smile.

“So wait,” he says playfully, “you didn’t like it?” Her teeth detach from her lip when she lets out a giggle and pokes him in the stomach.

“I love it you mouth breather,” she jokes, “thank you so much,” she says softly. Nodding, he’s about to kiss her again before the basement door opens and they hear Nancy shout down, “let’s go lovebirds, dinner’s ready!”

After Mike puts on El's necklace, the young couple make their way upstairs hand-in-hand and see the long wooden table covered in red placemats and more garland in the middle of the table, surrounded by the ham, stuffing, salad, sweet potato casserole, and roast chicken.

Hopper's sitting at one end of the table, surprisingly content chatting with Ted's much sweeter and attentive sister.

El takes the seat next to him and promises to save Mike's seat for him while he fills their plates with food. Michael's aunt, Linda, takes notice of El and reaches her hand over for El to shake it.

"Hi sweetie, I'm Michael's aunt Linda." El sweetly smiles, taking the woman's outstretched hand, "I'm El, Mike's girlfriend," she says proudly.

Hop looks at his daughter's smiling face before noticing her adjust a new piece of jewelry around her neck, squinting his eyes to get a better look. The girl notices her fathers look and extends the chain to show him.

"My present from Mike," she says with a soft smile.

Before he can answer, Linda squeals and looks over the man to get a better look. "Aw, how beautiful!" the woman gushes.

Mike returns a few minutes later, carefully carrying the two decorative plates stacked with savory foods. The distinguishing factor between the two, however, is the small piece of a crispy Eggo on the side of the plate.

El lets out a giggle and sends Mike a look of gratitude before grabbing his hand. The pair eats their meal surrounded by lively chatter and Christmas music, their warm hands interlocked.

The two clean their plates off and snag a few cookies from the dessert table before escaping to the basement again, Mike turning the tv to a cheesy Christmas movie as the two cuddle up on the couch.

They sit in silence watching the movie, El tucked into his side while his cheek rests on her head. Mike's about to break the silence when the basement door opens and heavy footsteps tread down the stairs.

Chief Hopper looks at the two before his tense face softens, cautiously joining them on the couch. "Hope you guys don't mind," the man says, "I just need a damn break."

They both chuckle at the slightly overwhelmed chief, El patting the spot next to her.

Together, the three watch the television while eating gingerbread cookies and laughing at Hop's groans when a cheesy line is uttered. Mike feels El's head slack against him, her tired eyes drooping as she cuddles her head further into his shoulder.

Hop feels himself smile at the sight of Mike kissing El's head, mumbling something softly on top of her curls. Mike's eyes meet her dad's and he feels himself flush slightly, giving him a shy smile.

Hopper smirks at him before biting into his gingerbread cookie, "Merry Christmas, kid," he says.

There are a few moments of silence before the boy squeaks out, "Merry Christmas, sir."

El's hand moves to the side to rest on Hopper's before him and Mike share a smile and quietly return their attention to the movie.